AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

Listing of Claims:

1-16. (Cancelled)

17. (Currently Amended) A system that routes a stage along a selectable path, comprising:

a first path with a plurality of armature windings disposed in a surface thereof; and

at least second and third paths that branch away from and are separate from the first path with armature windings disposed in surface(s) thereof and coupled to the first path *via* an intersection with armature windings disposed therein.

18. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 17, the armature windings disposed in the intersection can be selectively energized to route the stage from the first path to at least one of the second and third path.

19. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 17, the intersection has at least one armature winding that directs the stage from the first path to the second path when energized, and at least one armature winding that directs the stage from the first path to the third path when energized.

20. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 17, the intersection is on a moveable bridge that can be alternately positioned to connect the first path to the second path or to the third path.

21. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 20, the bridge is pivotable about a point at the end of the first path.

22. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 20, the bridge is moveable in a direction substantially orthogonal to the direction of the first path.

23. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 17, the stage comprises a linear motor that permits movement of the stage along at least one path.

24. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 23, the stage comprises at least one magnet that interacts with the selectively activated armature windings in the at least one path to effectuate movement of the stage along the at least one path.

25. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 17, further comprising an electrical bus connected to each of a plurality of armature windings in the paths to selectively apply electrical energy to the armature windings.

26. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 25, further comprising an amplifier coupled to each of the plurality of armature windings.

27. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 26, each amplifier comprises a switching device that controls the magnitude and direction of a magnetic field created upon energization of the armature winding.

28. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 27, a magnetic field of a first direction causes the stage to move in a forward direction along a path.

29. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 27, a magnetic field oriented in a second direction causes the stage to move in a reverse direction along the path.

30. (Currently Amended) A method for selectively routing a stage along a path, comprising:

detecting a position of a stage on a first path;

selecting a desired second path separate from the first path to which to route the stage from the first path; and

activating at least one armature winding in an intersection between the first path and the selected second path, the at least one armature winding is oriented to direct the stage from the first path to the second path upon activation.

31. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 30, activating the at least one armature coil creates a magnetic field that causes the stage to move through the intersection toward the selected second path.

32. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 31, further comprising moving a plurality of stages sequentially along a path and directing the plurality of stages sequentially through the intersection toward the selected second path.

33. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 32, the selected second path for a first stage is a different path than a selected second path for at least one other stage.

34. (Currently Amended) A system that facilitates selectively moving a stage along a path, comprising:

means for determining a position of the stage;

means for intersecting a first path with at least a second and a third path, the second and third paths are separate from the first path; and

means for magnetically directing the stage from the first path to at least one of the at least second and third paths via the means for intersecting the first path with the at least second and third paths.

35. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 34, the means for magnetically directing the stage comprises a plurality of selectively energizable armature windings disposed in the intersection.

36. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 35, further comprising means for reversing a direction of a magnetic field produced by at least one of the plurality of selectively energizable armature windings to reverse a direction of travel of the stage.